



OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Programmatic EIS

Background Information

Section 388 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAct), Public Law 109-58 (H.R. 6), enacted August 8, 2005, authorizes the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to grant leases, easements, or rights-of-way on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) for the development of renewable energy and to allow for alternate uses of existing facilities on the OCS. This authority will be exercised by the Minerals Management Service (MMS), a bureau of the DOI. MMS is establishing a new program to oversee these new operations on the OCS. To apply the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to the new program and rules, MMS plans to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement (Programmatic EIS). The Programmatic EIS will analyze the potential impacts associated with activities under the new program. Since the focus of this Programmatic EIS is on the program and rules, it is expected that subsequent NEPA documents prepared for site-specific alternate energy-related use projects will tier off of this Programmatic EIS and the Record of Decision. The proposed action to be analyzed in the Programmatic EIS is the implementation of the OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Program and rules in areas not excluded by the EPAct and the establishment of policies and best management practices for OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Program projects. The Programmatic EIS will focus on generic impacts from each industry sector based on global knowledge and identify key issues that subsequent, site-specific assessments should consider. Projections for industry activities will be limited to those anticipated to be pursued within the next 5 to 7 years. The Programmatic EIS will focus on the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with alternative approaches to the establishment of a national alternate energy program and rules. Information regarding all aspects of the Programmatic EIS is available on the Internet at <http://ocsenergy.anl.gov>.

What Are Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Projects?

The OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Program projects include, but are not limited to, offshore wind, wave, ocean current, and solar energy capture technologies. In addition, the technology of generating hydrogen using the energy captured from one of the above renewable resources on the OCS and transporting the hydrogen to the shore is included among the OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Program projects. MMS also was given jurisdiction over other projects that make alternate use of existing oil and natural gas platforms in Federal waters. Alternate uses of existing facilities may include, but would not be limited to, offshore aquaculture, research, education, recreation, support for other offshore operations and facilities, and telecommunications. Although the EPAct authorizes MMS to permit alternate uses of existing OCS facilities, MMS is not seeking authority over activities such as aquaculture, but only the decision to allow platforms to be converted to such uses if the appropriate agency approves the underlying activity.

Programmatic EIS Process and Schedule

Preparation of the OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Programmatic EIS is a multistep process that begins with Public Scoping and will include publication of a Draft Programmatic EIS, a Final Programmatic EIS, and a Record of Decision. These and other documents will be available for downloading and browsing on the EIS Documents page of the OCS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Programmatic EIS Information Center Web Site (<http://ocsenergy.anl.gov>). The Public Scoping Period is open from May 5, 2006, until July 5, 2006. The Draft Programmatic EIS is anticipated in early 2007.

Getting Involved

Public input into the Programmatic EIS process is encouraged. MMS invites interested parties to participate in the public scoping process, both to refine the preliminary alternatives and environmental issues to be analyzed in depth, and to eliminate from detailed study those alternatives and environmental issues that are not feasible or pertinent. The scoping process is intended to involve all interested agencies (Federal, state, county, and local), public interest groups, Native American tribes, businesses, and members of the public.

How to Submit Comments

There are three ways to submit comments or suggestions on the scope of the Programmatic EIS:

- Electronic submittal via the Web at <http://ocsenergy.anl.gov>,
- Regular mail, and
- Public scoping meetings (written or oral comments).

Written comments or suggestions on the scope of the Programmatic EIS can be mailed to:

MMS Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Programmatic EIS Scoping
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S. Cass Ave.
Argonne, IL 60439

All comments received or postmarked by July 5, 2006, will be considered. Comments received or postmarked after that date will be considered to the extent practicable. Oral, written, and electronic (i.e., Web site) comments will be given equal weight by MMS in defining the scope of this Programmatic EIS.